

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 294

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 294

Witness

Mr. Seamus Pouch,
35 O'Curry Road,
Fairbrothers Fields,
Dublin.

Identity

Captain Sluagh Brien Boru 1916;
Brigade Adjutant Dublin Brigade 1918-1920;
Assistant Q.M.G. 1920 - Truce.

Subject

Reorganisation of Fianna and
various incidents of national importance
1916-1921.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S.936

Form B.S.M. 2.

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SECOND STATEMENT BY SEAMUS POUNCH,
35, O'Curry Road, Fairbrothers Fields,
DUBLIN.

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After the Rising I was free and continued to work with the Fianna re organising branches, etc. I was a member of Provisional Committee operating in 1917. In 1918 I was Vice-Commandant to Eamon Martin who was in command of a special Fianna Commando, specially picked and organised to resist conscription; we were to operate with the 3rd Battalion, Dublin Brigade. I was chiefly occupied in Staff duties; I had charge of the Brigade class of signallers and instructor to First Aid classes and inspecting Company accounts.

Several incidents occurred where the Police actually avoided making issue with us, because they knew we would fight it out to the bitter end. This was ultimately demonstrated when Inspector Mills tried to pull Count Plunkett from a car from which he was addressing a public meeting in Beresford Place. He was tapped on the head with a hurley, wielded by a member of the Surrey House clique, and, as the blow was too hard or his skull too thin, he never recovered and was the first Police Inspector killed for being too officious. The escape of the striker was covered by a companion who had an automatic to keep the police at a safe distance; one policeman who was gaining on them in Abbey Street would have met a serious accident only he fell at the sight of the gun and also for the

fact that it had jammed. This avenged the death of our comrade killed by a blow of a police baton in the 1913 strike riots. This lad was kept in hiding amongst the clique and defied all attempt at arrest, and even big police rewards posted over the country had no results; and it caused them to reckon that now at least they were up against something, and they were (loyal comradeship).

Later at a funeral we marched to Glasnevin against Government orders and, to show our contempt for the order, marched home also. At the exit of cemetery a force of police under two Inspectors prepared to stop us; they were foiled in their intention by a set, determined body carrying hurdles and with a glint of battle in their eyes.

Later in 1918 I was Brigade Adjutant, and finally in 1920 Assistant Q.M.G. to Garry Holohan. I retired in 1922 with rank of Commandant. I took no active part in the civil war but had some exciting experiences.

During the conscription threat the Fianna formed special commandos of the older boys and 1916 survivors, and these were specially trained for shock tactics to co-operate with the Battalion of their area.

I was Vice Commandant to Eamon Martin of the Commando in the 3rd Battalion area. Skippers Alley

was our meeting place, and we were determined never to be conscripted.

I perfected a special mobilisation system that would work automatically in case of a sudden swoop. It was only necessary to contact one member who would in turn contact one more and report immediately to a pre-arranged rallying point. It was simple and the essence of speed, and could counteract the system of cordoning off areas by the military.

My business (Insurance) gave me plenty of roving about. I was continually on the alert and always ready to take advantage of anything that might turn up. Usually when caught up in patrol searches, I got away lightly once I gave my business, and the fact that I was employed in a Scotch firm added to my immunity.

Joseph Guilfoyle was also occupied in the same firm. I used to do his work, and he was then free for his A.S.U. activities. I once rode into a large military patrol in open formation in Dorset Street. As soon as I got well in, they halted, with me well held in the centre. The officer in charge must have had a hunch I was not as innocent as I pretended. I was thoroughly searched and interrogated; even little advertising cuts in my wallet had to be explained. I think he was suspecting code work. After a long time I was reluctantly let go. It was my biggest encounter with patrols.

After the shooting of a Major in the D.B.C. in Dame Street, I was coming through O'Connell Street with a few of the lads when suddenly the whole section of O'Connell Street from Parnell Street to the Pillar was cut off by tenders of Tans. All pedestrians and cyclists were ordered to the centre of the road and all exit side streets guarded. We gathered around a tree in the centre and recognised other I.R.A. men in our group. We exchanged notes, and found one had a revolver. I suggested that we back to the iron fence around the tree, and cover the lad who was to dump it behind his back into this fence, then move to the front; and as the Tans came to search each group, we advanced with our hands up, got searched and were allowed to pass on. We cut into Henry Street and, as soon as we were out of sight of the Tans, we made a speedy getaway in case they discovered the gun. They did not, and it was recovered later on by the owner.

Shortly after Constable Henry Kells was shot in Pleasant Street, one morning I was cycling down George's Street when suddenly troops and Tans stopped a tram and ordered out the passengers and held up every one; and I also had to dismount and was put against the pub at corner of Dame Lane in charge of a young soldier. I was watching the passengers leave the tram and wondering what had happened to cause this sudden flare-up, when I saw John Guilfoyle leaving the tram. I got a shock, because I knew if he was recognised his number was up. Suddenly, he wheeled

back into the tram, stooped and turned his back on the Tans outside; and as the tram was signalled to proceed, he appeared to be searching the tram, lifting the cushions. It worked, and off he went; and then that famous Tan of the Murder Gang, known as the "chink", appeared and took charge. I made an attempt to move away through the turn opposite in direction of the Stag's Head, and the soldier restrained me; and later on, when the Tans moved around into Dame Street, he motioned me to go. I often thought he was trying to be helpful. I got away casually at first and when out of sight I peddled much faster as I did not like this particular outfit.

The nearest squeak I had was during the burning of the Custom House. I was cycling along Tara Street towards Butt Bridge, when a Ford car full of Tan officers tore up in my direction with revolvers drawn. I could not stop; it would have been fatal; I kept going. I was covered by all; and one actually raised his arm and I thought my number was drawn. He did not fire, however, and I proceeded to view the Custom House and see if I could contact any of our lads to pilot them to safety as I had a good excuse for being in the neighbourhood as I had several Insurance calls in that area to fall back on if I was cornered.

I was used to being searched by loose patrols and I found it a good dodge to advance without any

hesitation and submit to the search, which was usually very casual when you did not hang back.

One night I noticed Sergeant Bruton, a G-man, watching No. 6, Harcourt Street. I took no notice as it was not unusual to see policemen pimping around. I went home and, just as I put my key in the door, I looked around and there was Bruton at my heels. He went on a bit and stopped; and then it was his turn to frown because he in turn was shadowed by two of our lads. He slunk off, and we had a chat and took the precaution to prepare for a raid. It never came. He must have got a fright. Soon after he was ordered by our team to leave the country or else! He choose to leave the country and saved his bacon.

One morning an old agent of ours tipped me off that his neighbour, who was a Q.M. in the 1st Battalion, was arrested, and that they were expecting a raid, and up to that time his pals had not come to take away the stuff. I immediately saw Bob Conlon of the Fianna who got a handcart and a few lads, and we cleared the house just in time, because the house was raided and the boards and cupboards ripped out in search for arms.

Another chance item came my way through a girl who worked in the Court Laundry. She brought me a document which was found in the pocket of a shop boy's white coat, headed 'Óglaigh na hÉireann', and dealt with stores, etc, and some of it in code. The document had

been tabled with the supervisor, as was the rule for anything found in laundry property, to be returned later to the owner.

There was real danger here that this document might find its way elsewhere, so I took charge of it and reported at once to Paddy Conlon of York Street whose area the document related. It was very important; and the place was cleared and no damage was caused by this slip on the part of a busy shop man.

Instances like these were occurring frequently and were dealt with on the spot.

Odd lots of ammunition came mainly through British soldiers home on leave, and were collected and sent to the proper quarter. Several bomb cases, some nickel plated as ornaments, were picked up and sent for filling. Once I picked up 50 .45 bullets from a soldier for 5/-, and at this time they were very scarce. I gave them to Joe Guilfoyle, as I knew his team were most in need of them.

The Fianna staff used to meet in Nassau Street in a tailor's work-rooms. The place was safe for a long time, but one evening I arrived for a meeting and was stopped outside, warned not to enter as a raid was to be made that night. We hung around, and sure enough it was raided; and the police carried off all the material found, but nothing of any great

importance. I used a loose leaf minute book, and only brought the previous meeting's minutes along as a precaution, as they could be quickly destroyed in case of such an emergency.

Just after the Collinstown raid by Paddy Holohan, I was invited to Mrs. Tom Clarke's place in Richmond Road where Fr. O'Flanagan was on a visit. The Countess wanted me to meet him, and after supper we started for home. The curfew was on, and I had quite an exciting journey across the city to Charlemont Street. It took me over an hour to make it, and I was nearly jammed in Harcourt Street when the Tans in a tender swung into the street from Harcourt Road, flashed the searchlight, and I had to throw myself flat on a steps to avoid detection. It would have been hard luck to be captured only a few hundred yards from my home.

On Bloody Sunday I met Michael Davis of C. Company, 3rd Battalion, who was out that morning. We were dodging around, and met a member of A. Company who told us he was in a fix. He had to dump his .45 under a gate in Gordon's Lane, off Richmond Street, as troops were coming in his direction. We agreed to retrieve it. We were joined by two other Fianna members, and we went and collected it, and set out to escort him home to Mount Pleasant Avenue. As we approached the avenue from the canal, troops and police were waiting on Portobello Bridge to search us. I told

the lad with the gun to casually turn into the avenue; and the four of us boldly walked towards the Bridge to be searched and diverted the attention off the man with the gun; and he got home safely; and we went through after a search.

I was in Belfast once on Trade Union business with Seamus Byrne, who was an old 1916 man. He had a message for a prisoner who was in Crumlin Road Jail. I accompanied him and asked to see Austin Stack as a diversion. Both prisoners were brought into a visiting room and each had a warder standing by. I had never met Stack in person before, but he acted up to the occasion, and the interview passed off normally

I got a great surprise the morning I read of the Treaty being signed in London.

I knew we had not much material to continue the fight, even allowing for what we imported during the truce, and that the ordinary people were wearing down under the strain of the terror and would be on for accepting an end to hostilities.

I remember discussing the matter with Liam Mellows, R.I.P.; he was anything but pleased. He told me that the people might accept it but that the army would not. "The army will fight it", he said. Later Garry Holohan also rejected it and said Free State soldiers in green uniform were no different to him than the R.I.C. who also were Irishmen. From this point onwards, difference of opinion arose, and sharp divisions came in almost every unit. I could

not imagine Irishmen fighting Irishmen on the issue involved, because in the end what was left would be mopped up by the British and all our efforts of past years frustrated and in its wake a trail of bitterness. I decided not to take any further part in the fighting.

I was suspected by both sides, in turn, of active service during the Civil War but, when I gave a solemn assurance, my word was accepted and it ended at that. Once I was arrested by an unknown man on the way home, I was searched for a gun, and when I had none and gave a solemn word I was not active, I was allowed to go home. If I had a gun that night even by accident, I felt my number was up, because he only went to one pocket, my usual gun pocket.

I had an uncomfortable experience early in the Civil War. I was walking along the south side of Stephen's Green; a small group of very young lads were in front. There was the noise of a military tender coming along Harcourt Street towards Grafton Street. Suddenly these youths turned around, drew revolvers and prepared to ambush. I was thus between two fires in a fraction of a minute. Shots were not exchanged, and I felt I was indeed lucky once more.

Fianna Éireann.

We held the ideal of a great Irish Nation,
And devoted our lives to that end,
Building once more on that ancient foundation,

An Army for Ireland, its rights to defend.

SIGNED:

Joe Dunch

DATE:

19th Sept 1949

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No. W.S. *294*

WITNESS:

Seán Brennan

DATE:

19. 9. 49